

From Impoliteness to Aggression: Examining Cyberbullying Patterns on Sina Weibo Using the “Discourse-Cognition-Society” Model

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Abstract: This study applies Culpeper’s Impoliteness Strategy and van Dijk’s “Discourse-Cognition-Society” Model to analyze 664 comments from nine cyberbullying incidents on Sina Weibo, examining these within their social contexts. Ten sub-strategies were identified, belonging to two main categories: bald-on record and off-record impoliteness strategies, finding a dominant use of bald-on record strategies. Our analysis underscores that with the use of impoliteness strategies, cyberbullying language mirrors the cognition and ideologies of speakers, such as traditional attitudes towards “good students” and the prejudice against non-mainstream appearances, reflecting the trends in public opinion, influencing societal cognition and dynamics. Extending van Dijk’s framework, our study offers new insights into the complex interplay between online communication, societal realities, and cognitive processes. Furthermore, this study proposes recommendations for managing online communication, conducive to fostering a sound online communication environment.

Keywords: Cyberbullying; “Discourse-Cognition-Society” Model; Impoliteness Strategies; Social Media; Societal Norms.

1. Introduction

In the era of digital omnipresence, a single online comment can ignite controversies, reflecting and reshaping societal norms and individual behaviors in previously unimaginable ways. This phenomenon, at the heart of digital communication’s rapid evolution, underscores the urgent need to comprehend the mechanisms of cyberbullying—a modern scourge that amplifies existing power imbalances through the anonymity and lack of direct accountability provided by online communication [1]. High-profile incidents on social media platforms frequently spark national debates about online behavior, digital ethics, and the need for stricter regulations to protect vulnerable populations, highlighting the pervasive impact of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying unfolds a unique vista to scrutinize the complex interplay between language, cognition, and societal dynamics. The discourse of cyberbullying, permeated with aggressive and offensive language, not only reflects the darker facets of societal attitudes but also acts as an arena for contesting power dynamics. The intricate network of interactions, wherein choices of linguistic strategies denote deeper cognitive processes and ideologies [2], demands a thorough investigation that surpasses basic level analysis.

Despite extensive exploration of digital discourse via numerous theoretical lenses, the explicit application of van Dijk’s “discourse-cognition-society” model to the context of cyberbullying remains sparse [3]. This lacuna in the literature affords a significant opportunity to bridge this gap and further elucidate the dynamics of online harassment within a broader sociocognitive framework. This research directly contributes to the existing literature by extending van Dijk’s model to the digital domain of cyberbullying, offering fresh insights into how impoliteness strategies within this discourse unveil the intricate nexus between individual cognitive processes, societal norms, and power dynamics.

Employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

framework, this investigation pioneers into the realms of cyberbullying through the innovative lens of the “discourse-cognition-society” model. This exploration aims to dissect the strategic utilization of language in online harassment, revealing its reflection and molding of societal norms and cognitive orientations.

Guided by two central research questions, this inquiry delves into: 1) The manifestation of specific impoliteness strategies within cyberbullying discourse and the insights they offer into the nature of cyberbullying and social interactions. 2) The ideologies, cognitive and societal implications reflected by these strategies, particularly in shaping social cognition.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying exploits anonymity to intimidate victims. Research distinguishes direct and indirect forms, highlighting its long-term impact on social cohesion and mental well-being [4]. Cyberbullying reflects individual biases and societal influences, requiring a holistic approach blending discourse analysis with societal and cognitive frameworks.

Research distinguishes between direct and indirect forms of cyberbullying and its technological and verbal manifestations. Cyberbullying affects social cohesion and mental well-being [5,6]. This highlights the need for exploring its impact on individual and societal cognitive processes.

2.2. Online Verbal Aggression

Analyses of aggressive language in online communication date back to the 1980s and define it as “hostile and aggressive interactions via text-based computer mediated-communication” [7]. Verbal aggression, involving harmful behavior through words rather than physical means, manifests as a destructive form of communication in both face-to-face

and computer-mediated interactions [8]. It can be exhibited in three dimensions: intellect, physical appearance, and worthiness [9], which provides us with a valuable perspective for analyzing comments in cyberbullying.

Relevantly, Veiga Simão et al. explored verbal aggression in cyberbullying, identifying nine categories such as threats, sexual harassment, mockery, and image misuse [10]. Their study, while comprehensive, lacks a specific linguistic framework. In our research, we address this gap by categorizing cyberbullying speech acts with a foundational framework-impoliteness strategies. Recognizing impoliteness as a characteristic of aggressive language will enhance our comprehension of cyberbullying dynamics, offering valuable insights into the nuanced aspects of this pervasive issue.

Furthermore, scholars have long recognized the close nexus between impoliteness and aggression. Implicated in the genesis of social harms, aggression entails damage to the social identity of the targeted individuals, precipitating a diminution of their power or status. Such social harms are typically manifested through insults, reproaches, sarcasm, and a spectrum of impolite behaviors [11]. Analytical perspectives on the societal impacts of verbal aggression consider various dimensions, including gender, race, adolescence, criminality, school bullying, marital dissolution, public employment, and workplace harassment [12], which offers a novel perspective on analysis of comments within the context of cyberbullying.

2.3. Impoliteness in Online Contexts

About the relationship between politeness and impoliteness strategies, different scholars have different opinions. Some considered impoliteness strategies as the opposite side of politeness strategies within politeness frameworks [13] or “the broad opposite of politeness” [14], others argue that “politeness and impoliteness are not at opposite ends of a simple unitary scale”.

About the definition of impoliteness, it was first proposed by Culpeper, as following: “Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person’s or group’s identities are mediated by others in interaction.” Such behaviors always cause offence to others, with “intentional” as the character of impoliteness [15].

Impoliteness in online contexts is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a reflection of deeper sociocognitive processes that shape and are shaped by digital discourse. Culpeper's seminal work on impoliteness strategies, derived from Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, categorizes impoliteness into direct strategies, such as “Bald on-record impoliteness”, and more nuanced ones like “Sarcasm or mock politeness” [16]. These strategies are pervasive across various discourses [17], serving as a lens through which to examine the intersection of language, cognition, and societal norms.

In the realm of online contexts, the application of impoliteness strategies becomes particularly salient. Feng and Ren and Zhong have explored the prevalence and forms of these strategies in online consumer reviews and on Sina Weibo, respectively, revealing the adaptability and impact of impoliteness in shaping online interactions and societal perceptions [18, 19].

This body of research provides a foundational

understanding of impoliteness in online contexts. By situating impoliteness within the broader framework of the “discourse-cognition-society” model, this study extends the exploration of impoliteness strategies into the domain of cyberbullying on Sina Weibo. It aims to uncover how these linguistic choices not only reflect individual and societal cognitions but also activate the reconstruction of social norms and power relations. This nuanced approach offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which digital discourse perpetuates, challenges, and reshapes social norms, thereby enriching our understanding of the complex interplay between online discourse, choice of strategies, cognitive processes, and societal structures.

2.4. Integrating “Discourse-Cognition-Society” Model to Cyberbullying Discourse

Previous research by Wodak et al. integrated Critical Discourse Analysis with impoliteness strategies to examine impolite behaviors exhibited by Donald Trump and Silvio Berlusconi in official press conferences [20]. Through case studies, it was found that the remarks of these leaders manifested insults rooted in racism and sexism. Their study highlighted the significance of exploring socio-political discourse through the lens of impoliteness, providing new insights for our examination of cyberbullying discourse.

Our study attempts to integrate the “discourse-cognition-society” model into the analysis of cyberbullying discourse, which would bridge linguistic behavior with broader cognitive and societal contexts in innovative ways. Applying van Dijk's model as a lens to scrutinize the impoliteness strategies within cyberbullying on Sina Weibo, this study aims to reveal not just the linguistic choices but their embeddedness in deeper cognitive processes and societal structures. This dual focus underscores the multidimensional impact of cyberbullying discourse, emphasizing its role in both reflecting and shaping societal norms and power relations.

The integration aims to contribute to the field by enhancing our understanding of the intricate interplay between language use, individual cognition, and societal structures in cyberbullying contexts. It elaborates on the role of impoliteness as a strategic choice within cyberbullying, which is both influenced by and influential in shaping the bully's social and cognitive environment. This approach, grounded in the theoretical underpinnings provided by Culpeper's work on impoliteness strategies, is significantly enriched by van Dijk's broader perspective on the societal implications of discourse, offering a novel approach to studying cyberbullying through a comprehensive, multidisciplinary lens.

However, it is important to note that while this theoretical integration provides valuable new insights, it also introduces analytical challenges, particularly in mapping the complex interactions between discourse and societal structures. Addressing these challenges, this study employs extensive data and adopts sophisticated methodological approaches, ensuring a rigorous analysis that highlights the intersection of impoliteness strategies with societal and cognitive factors.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges its scope limitations and does not claim to encapsulate the entirety of the cyberbullying phenomenon. Instead, it aims to shed light on aspects particularly relevant to the “discourse-cognition-society” nexus, thereby making a targeted contribution to our understanding of cyberbullying. Through this focused analysis, the study seeks to inform future research and

interventions, aiming to mitigate the impact of cyberbullying in digital environments and contribute to the development of healthier digital communication practices.

3. Data

3.1. Data Collection

We investigated cyberbullying on Sina Weibo, China's most influential media platform with 605 million users as of September 2023. Using Web Scraper, we collected 664 anonymized comments from nine incidents, ensuring privacy protection. The selected incidents showcased a range of contexts, reflecting diverse cyberbullying dynamics. This methodological rigor situates our study within van Dijk's "discourse-cognition-society" framework.

Using the Google Chrome extension Web Scraper, we collected user comment threads from nine cyberbullying incidents in 2023. This process was aimed specifically at capturing content relevant to the dynamics of cyberbullying and violent language, ensuring a focused and relevant dataset. To address ethical considerations and protect individual privacy, all collected data were anonymized, with personally identifiable information removed, resulting in a comprehensive dataset of 664 comments (totaling 10,632 Chinese characters). Most comments, originally in Chinese, were translated into English as necessary for subsequent analysis.

Our approach to data collection not only provides a detailed account of the practical steps taken to gather data but also situates these efforts within the study's theoretical framework. By doing so, we aim to offer insights that are both methodologically sound and deeply rooted in a nuanced understanding of cyberbullying's societal and cognitive dimensions. This methodological rigor, combined with a strong theoretical foundation, exemplifies the comprehensive nature of our research, aiming to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on cyberbullying within digital communication landscapes.

In selecting the nine cyberbullying incidents for our study, we prioritized incidents that showcased a wide range of contexts, severity, and public responses to capture a broad spectrum of cyberbullying dynamics on Sina Weibo. This diversity ensures our findings reflect a comprehensive picture of cyberbullying experiences across different segments of the platform's user base. The comments were selected based on their explicit demonstration of impoliteness strategies, relevance to the cyberbullying event, and the potential to reveal the complex interplay between societal norms and individual cognition. This meticulous selection process aimed to illuminate the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying discourse within the theoretical framework of van Dijk's "discourse-cognition-society" model, enhancing the relevance and depth of our analysis.

3.2. Data Analysis

This study combines top-down and bottom-up methods to analyze impoliteness strategies in cyberbullying. Using frameworks by Culpeper and others, our analysis identified ten sub-strategies under bald on-record and off-record categories. Coding with NVivo software ensured consistency ($\kappa = 0.88$), revealing the prevalence and significance of each strategy. Applying van Dijk's model, we contextualized the discourse within broader socio-cognitive dynamics.

This dual approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis,

leading to a tailored Impoliteness Strategy Framework for Sina Weibo's cyberbullying context. Under this framework, impoliteness is classified into main categories of bald on-record and off-record strategies, further detailed into ten sub-strategies, including ridicule, insult, belittling, slander, scorn, curse, threat, taboo, sarcasm, and insinuation. This novel classification not only aligns with, but also expands upon, Culpeper's "superstrategies" by incorporating new insights derived directly from the data.

In the coding process, coders identify the categories of impoliteness strategies through key words in these comments. This classification process possesses inherent subjectivity; therefore, it is performed repetitively by two coders using NVivo software. For contentious tags, they are finalized after extensive discussions and in accordance with established classification standards from previous studies. This coding procedure underscores our commitment to methodological rigor. The integration of frequency statistics and distribution analysis illuminated the prevalence and significance of each impoliteness strategy. Explicit criteria for coding and distinguishing between strategies were established, ensuring that each identified strategy reflects the interconnectedness of discourse, cognitive processes, and societal structures as proposed by van Dijk. Achieving an inter-coder reliability of $\kappa = 0.88$, the study ensured a high level of consistency, with any discrepancies thoughtfully resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Additionally, the application of van Dijk's model prompted a deeper exploration of the societal and cognitive underpinnings of impoliteness strategies, enabling us to contextualize the cyberbullying discourse within broader socio-cognitive dynamics. This led to a more nuanced understanding of how impoliteness in cyberbullying discourse serves as a reflection of individuals' intentions as well as a manifestation of underlying societal norms and cognitive biases.

4. Findings

Table 1. Distribution of Impoliteness Strategies in Cyberbullying Cases

Impoliteness Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bald on-record impoliteness	471	70.93
ridicule	129	19.43
insult	88	13.25
belittling	87	13.10
slander	62	9.34
scorn	59	8.89
curse	30	4.52
threat	9	1.36
taboo	7	1.05
Off-record impoliteness	193	29.07
insinuation	118	17.77
sarcasm	75	11.30
Total	664	100.00

In this study, impoliteness strategies in cyberbullying comments are divided into bald on-record impoliteness (ridicule, insult, scorn, belittling, slander, curse, threat, taboo)

and off-record impoliteness (insinuation, sarcasm). Table 1 shows the frequency and proportion of each strategy, with bald on-record strategies (70.93%) being more prevalent than off-record strategies (29.07%). Ridicule and insinuation are the most frequent sub-strategies, while threat and taboo are the least used. The following sections illustrate comments under these strategies and analyze them using van Dijk's "discourse-cognition-society" model.

4.1. Bald On-Record Impoliteness

Bald on-record impoliteness strategies, characterized by direct, unambiguous, and confrontational acts, are explicit in nature and are typically used to assert dominance or to challenge the face of the addressee directly. This category encompasses several sub-strategies in our study, including ridicule, insult, scorn, belittling, slander, curse, threat and taboo, which are directly from or are innovated according to Culpeper's studies. The first three strategies (ridicule, insult, scorn) are derived from Culpeper and will not be explained in detail below. This part will focus on explaining the last five strategies we expanded.

Belittling

In our study, belittling refers to a strategy deliberately employed to diminish or derogate the value, abilities, or achievements of another individual. This can manifest in various forms, including the use of condescending language, disparagement of others' opinions, or the derogation of their accomplishments. Compared with scorn, belittling mainly focuses on reducing the perceived value or stature of the person being addressed. While scorn is used to express contemptuous feelings towards someone. Example (1) provides an illustration of how the belittling strategy is employed in cyberbullying incidents.

(1) Internet celebrities are excellent, living a leisurely life. I can't comprehend how this occupation can make money. It feels so inauthentic! 😏 [death smile]

In this comment, the speaker employed the word "excellent", but it was used sarcastically, particularly followed by the term "idle and at leisure". All these words diminished or derogated the performance and abilities of this teacher, suggesting a stereotype that internet celebrities are not engaged in meaningful work, reflecting the speaker's underlying dissatisfaction. The inclusion of an emoticon 😏 further emphasizes the sentiment, embodying apathy and speechlessness. In the Chinese online context, the "smiling face" emoji, often humorously termed the "death smile", diverges from its conventional positive connotation, instead being used to express dissatisfaction and passive aggression. This adds an ironic layer, signaling the author's annoyance and resignation.

This commentary reflects societal prejudice against internet celebrities, highlighting a perception of an uneven effort-reward balance across occupations. Negative sentiments towards internet celebrities, perceived as conflicting with conventional work ethics and values, influence public perception and reinforce biases against them.

Slander

In this study, slander strategies involve making false charges or misrepresentations that defame another's reputation, leading to significant social repercussions. It typically results in the social identity defamation of the individual subjected to false accusations, thereby leading to significant repercussions. This strategy is the easiest to judge, namely, the subjectivity and lack of evidence in the discourse.

Within the cyberbullying comments, the slander strategy ranks sixth. This observation underscores that within the anonymous and non-accountable online space, numerous internet users are emboldened to engage in spreading false rumors and slander, fabricating facts based on their own cognition. The following example illustrates the use of slander strategy.

(2) Her father must be in a leadership position, and probably engaged in some corruption.

Example (2) involves a high school girl who is passionate about rock climbing; her father was the first climber from Hunan Province to summit Mount Everest. As a national-level athlete, the girl is dedicated to pursuing her own mountaineering dreams. Her father supports her ambition to climb Everest through crowdfunding. However, this behavior has met with opposition and disparagement from some netizens.

In this comment, the speaker speculates, "Her father must be in a leadership position", a claim made without concrete evidence. This association of "engaged in some corruption" with "leadership" indicates a cognitive bias by the speaker. The inherent cognition of this commentator is that only leaders have the audacity for open fund solicitation, hinting at a certain societal status of leaders.

Such slander not only stigmatizes the identity of the victim, but also mirrors a common negative societal view towards the leadership class, often linked with corruption. The commentary reflects a general social cognition that assumes individuals in leadership roles enjoy specific statuses and privileges, enabling them to initiate fundraising activities. It also reveals a societal inclination to equate leadership with a propensity for corruption. This concise statement captures widespread ideologies and highlights public reflections on societal power disparities.

Curse

Curse strategies, characterized by the use of swear words, profanity, or ill wishes, are not merely linguistic expressions of anger or disdain. In many cultures, these expressions are laden with deep societal implications, symbolizing not only personal animosity but also violating cultural norms and etiquettes. Especially in Chinese society, where harmony and social decorum are highly valued, cursing is viewed as a severe breach of conduct, often associated with malevolence and social ostracization.

(3) Hope you die on the mountain.

Example (2) and (3) are both derived from the same case. The comment "die" serves as a stark illustration of how curse strategies transcend mere words to challenge societal norms and individual identity. By using the homonym "斯" for "die", the commentator not only wishes harm upon the individual but also indirectly contests the societal legitimacy of the individual's aspirations.

This particular instance reveals much about the underlying social cognition. It uncovers a collective societal bias that marginalizes individuals, particularly women, who engage in unconventional pursuits. The comment, therefore, is not just an expression of personal disapproval but a manifestation of broader societal attitudes that seek to constrain individual actions within the confines of traditional norms. The widespread support for such views, indicates a troubling societal tendency to discourage diversity and innovation under the guise of preserving social harmony.

Moreover, this example highlights the complex interplay between language, cognition, and society. The use of curse as

a discursive strategy in cyberbullying reflects deeply ingrained cognitive biases and stereotypes, which, when articulated through language, serve to perpetuate and validate these biases within the digital sphere. Such expressions of cyberbullying not only have immediate impacts on the victims but also contribute to the shaping of digital culture and societal norms, underscoring the need for a critical examination of online discourse and its broader societal implications.

Threat

Goffman identifies three types of threats: intentional, incidental, and accidental [21]. In the realm of cyberbullying, threats are predominantly intentional, aimed at causing harm, loss, or punishment with explicit intent to frighten, as delineated by Culpeper. An illustrative example of such a threat is the comment directed at a young woman who, despite losing a leg in the Wenchuan earthquake, has embraced life with a prosthetic limb and encourages others through her positive online presence.

(4) You're quite annoying and really good at pretending. If you dare post one more, I'll report each one.

This comment not only challenges the woman's authenticity but seeks to silence her expression, showcasing a blatant disregard for her resilience and positivity. The threat to report her posts aims to intimidate, leveraging the digital platform's mechanisms for a potentially disenfranchising effect. This act of cyberbullying reveals deep-seated prejudices against individuals with disabilities, portraying them as unworthy of a public platform or positive self-presentation.

From the victim's perspective, this threat is perceived not just as an attack on her digital identity, but a broader societal rejection of her right to self-expression and equality. This incident underscores the critical need for digital environments that support and protect the expression of marginalized individuals.

The broader societal interpretation of such threats illuminates entrenched stereotypes and biases against disabled individuals, revealing a disturbing tendency to question the authenticity of their positive outlooks. This skepticism not only marginalizes the individual but also perpetuates a culture of exclusion, undermining efforts towards achieving a more inclusive society. The prevalence of threat-based cyberbullying thus reflects and exacerbates social divisions, calling for enhanced awareness, regulatory frameworks, and community norms that prioritize empathy, inclusion, and respect.

Taboo

Taboo strategy involves employing terminologies or colloquialisms deemed inappropriate or offensive across diverse cultural milieus to convey intense negative emotions. In the data we have analyzed, it is evident that the frequency of taboo is only 1.05%, representing the lowest frequency among all strategies. This observation suggests that most individuals recognize and adhere to cultural norms in our context, indicating that taboos have, to a certain extent, effectively been restricted. Example (5) exemplifies the utilization of taboo strategy.

(5) slut-shaming 🤢 [vomit]

The context of the comment is: A female graduate student at a key normal university posted a photo of herself and her hospitalized grandfather with the caption "Hope Grandpa gets better" and "received a letter of admission to graduate school". However, netizens were dissatisfied with her image—red hair.

In example (5), the commentator utilizes the taboo terminology "slut-shaming", an explicitly pejorative lexicon directed towards females, an epithet that denigrates women for perceived transgressions against conventional moral paradigms. The application of the term "shaming" manifests the commentator's attitude, transcending mere critique of physical appearance, derogatory assessment of the student's image. This taboo choice and similar comments from other netizens mirror societal discriminatory sentiments towards individuals who diverge from traditional female archetypes.

Furthermore, the comment incorporates the emoticon 🤢 [vomit] to accentuate the commentator's revulsion and contempt. This confluence of language and visual symbolism highlights prevalent gender biases and the intense scrutiny of this student's appearance, exposing entrenched prejudices against those with non-mainstream image.

4.2. Off-record Impoliteness

In off-record impoliteness strategies, the face threatening act (FTA) is performed by means of an implicature, and its aggression may not necessarily weaker than bald on-record strategies. In our study, off-record impoliteness strategies include sarcasm and insinuation.

Insinuation

In this study, we identified "insinuation" as a distinct superstrategy, characterized by its implicit way in delivering criticism. This strategy, utilizing a tone of innuendo and vagueness, subtly undermines the target's reputation, causing the addressee to think more about the appropriateness of their behaviors. The employment of this strategy can be understood as PUA in the buzzword. At the same time, the strategy appears non-aggressive while safeguarding the speaker's social image. By opting such strategy, speakers can adeptly address sensitive subjects or navigate power differentials, exerting influence while preserving politeness or neutrality.

Our data reveals insinuation's usage frequency at 17.77%, remarkably ranking it second. Despite the general dominance of bald on-record strategies, this high frequency of insinuation, a type of off-record impoliteness, indicates a slight preference for indirectness in certain communicative contexts. The following statement demonstrates the use of the insinuation impoliteness strategy.

(6) How terrifying it is, brainwashing in schools is really intense nowadays!

The context of the comment involves a senior high school female student who took an oath at a school rally to inspire herself and her peers before Chinese College Entrance Examination. Although her speech was motivational, some netizens perceived it as hysterical and overly excited, leading to the occurrence of cyberbullying. Ultimately, the school intervened to shield the student and prevent psychological distress.

In this commentary, the speaker employs insinuation to satirize contemporary education. Firstly, the use of "terrifying" indicates that the speaker's description of school education carries a strongly negative sentiment, possibly referring to the excessive stress in the learning environment, making bystanders feel uncomfortable. Secondly, the comparison of school education to "brainwashing" (PUA) serves as a satire of the formalism within education, mocking the imposition of extremist ideologies onto students. The phrase "really intense" indicates dissatisfaction with the current situation and a strong critique.

Similar expressions reflect the discontent of some netizens

towards the pressures and rigidity within China's exam-oriented education system, as well as the suppression of creative thinking in students. These expressions also mirror a broader societal impression of the education system, particularly criticism of formalism and excessive examinations. This further dissemination can induce public thinking among the masses, leading public opinion towards a negative direction, for instance, it may prompt the public to reconsider the issues inherent in Chinese education, leading to a unilateral and negative perception of Chinese-style education among the society.

Sarcasm

Culpeper defines sarcasm as a meta-strategy of impoliteness that intricately relies on Leech's Grice-based principle of irony. This strategy executes face-threatening acts (FTAs) by employing insincerely polite statements, thus only offering a facade of politeness. Unlike insinuation, which subtly communicates adverse intentions without direct contradictions, sarcasm employs a more explicit form of critique. Within our dataset, sarcasm was identified in 11.30% of the interactions, underscoring its significant but nuanced role in cyberbullying. While sarcasm can occasionally be humorous, its primary function in cyberbullying contexts is to serve as a covert vehicle for delivering damaging and mocking criticism.

(7) Never be an athlete any more, just make money by live streaming. Even if you get insulted, it brings you "liuliang" (popularity).

The situation with Wu Yanni is this: she has left an impression of arrogance and excessive self-confidence, conflicting with the public's typical expectations of athletes, thereby eliciting dissatisfaction among the public.

In this comment, the sarcastic remark mirrors stereotypical standards for athletes and societal skepticism towards the internet celebrity phenomenon, where notoriety and financial success are increasingly decoupled from traditional markers of effort and achievement. It unveils a cognitive dissonance against new media professions. This commentary not only challenges the individual's choice of profession but also subtly critiques the evolving digital landscape's impact on societal values concerning work and success.

The perpetuation of such sarcastic commentary in digital discourse contributes to a narrative of occupational inequality, casting new media careers in a disparaging light. This not only reflects but potentially exacerbates entrenched societal biases against non-traditional careers, undermining the legitimacy and value of success in the digital age. Moreover, the utilization of sarcasm as a discursive strategy in cyberbullying underscores how linguistic choices are influenced by and reflective of broader societal norms and cognitive biases.

5. Discussion

5.1. Impoliteness Strategies within Cyberbullying Discourse

In the realm of Sina Weibo, our data underscores a pronounced dominance of bald on-record (direct) impoliteness strategies in violent comments, as bald on-record strategies, due to their directness, serve as powerful mechanisms to threaten individuals' face. This result suggests that when the intent behind cyberbullying is to inflict maximum emotional or psychological harm, the bald on-record strategy becomes a preferred tool for aggressors. The digital realm, with its cloak of anonymity, might further

embolden users to employ these more direct forms of aggression [22].

Analyzing cyberbullying incidents, this study finds that impoliteness strategies can lead to victims' societal ostracization. Bald on-record strategies, particularly those challenging victims' integrity and identities, are more damaging [23]. While off-record strategies may avoid direct accountability, they also negatively affect victims, leading to feelings of misunderstanding or isolation. Our analysis shows that cyberbullying language reflects the cognition and ideologies of online speakers, mirroring public opinion trends and societal cognition. This highlights the complex interplay of language, power, social cognition, and societal norms within online communication platforms.

Certain impoliteness strategies, like ridicule and insinuation, are common in comments about celebrities, reflecting jealousy and a preference for negative news [24]. These strategies aim to diminish social standing and redefine power relations.

In the context of Chinese culture, these impoliteness strategies are not only a means of expressing dissatisfaction or attacking others but also reflect the broader social and cultural atmosphere. For example, the concept of "face" is extremely important in Chinese culture, and insults and ridicule may be used to undermine others' social standing to maintain one's own face [25]. In this cultural context, aggressive language is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a tool of power and status struggles, reflecting deeper social structures and values [26]. These strategies are particularly evident on Chinese social media platforms, especially in discussions involving public figures and hot topics. Therefore, understanding these strategies within the context of Chinese culture is crucial for revealing the social psychological mechanisms of cyberbullying.

Additionally, upon further analysis, it is apparent that ridicule is a dominant sub-strategy within the context of cyberbullying. It is described as a mechanism to accentuate speakers' relative power. Our study corroborates this view, finding that ridicule is frequently used to diminish the social standing of victims, particularly in contexts where the aggressor seeks to assert dominance. The data indicates that such strategies are not only prevalent but also particularly harmful in undermining the social and psychological well-being of victims. This highlights the need for targeted interventions and educational programs to address the specific dynamics of cyberbullying within different cultural contexts.

The strategy ranking second in usage frequency is insinuation, characterized by its implication of negative attributes or intentions. It functions through a nuanced tone of implicitness and ambiguity, eschewing overt declarations. The widespread adoption of this strategy is attributable to its indirect modality; these comments can effectively conceal the commentator's malevolence, thus maintaining one's "face" or social image. This strategy can be regarded as the most strategic one, as its expression is devoid of vulgarity yet imbued with profound implications, effectively fulfilling commentators' objectives.

Other frequently employed strategies include insult, sarcasm, and belittling. Insult, a particular conventionalized impoliteness formula belonging to on-record impoliteness, similar with ridicule, often leads to a more pronounced and direct impact on victims' social identity. Sarcasm, an off-record strategy, while often used humorously, in

cyberbullying contexts, it predominantly serves as a veiled mechanism for delivering hurtful and mocking criticisms. Belittling, employed directly, can often be subtle enough to avoid causing significant disruption to victims' social group dynamics. Despite the attack, victims may still maintain their group membership, albeit with a diminished status.

The utilization of strategies such as threats, curses, and taboo words is comparatively infrequent. These strategies are rooted in the bully's desire for power, control, or revenge. Characterized by their directness and transparency, they function as unambiguous instruments for establishing supremacy and causing emotional distress. Their occurrence in cyberbullying incidents indicates their effectiveness as expedient means to demean victims. Nonetheless, there is a noticeable decline in their application, likely due to evolving cultural norms and constraints.

The implications of our research are profound. It not only corroborates the findings of Culpeper and others regarding digital interactions but also highlights the necessity for a more nuanced and detailed examination of online impoliteness.

5.2. Relations among Cyberbullying Discourse, Speakers' Cognition and Social Influence

Language and society do not relate directly but rather involve the intermediate link of the human brain [27]. Using language strategies to analyze online comments offers a unique lens to understand the underlying cognition and stereotypes prevalent in virtual communities. Meanwhile, employing van Dijk's "discourse-cognition-society" model facilitates a multidimensional analysis, focusing on societal background, power relations, and social impact.

Societal norms and values are often reflected in online communities. While impoliteness strategies used in comments often mirror these norms, implicitly reinforcing or challenging them. For instance, comments that employ stereotypes or derogatory language towards the graduate student with red hair reflect traditional societal attitudes towards "good students", and the prejudice against non-mainstream appearances; comments towards internet celebrities reflect a rejection of "internet celebrity" as a non-traditional occupation. Furthermore, they influence social cognition and the direction of public opinion regarding pertinent events, thereby affecting individual social identities and social relations.

Through discourse analysis, this study elucidates the underlying individual ideologies and personal/social cognitive processes reflected by linguistic strategies in cyberbullying contexts. An intricate comprehension of the nexus between cyberbullying discourse, cognitive processes, and social structures is imperative for effectively addressing and mitigating aggressive online discourse. Furthermore, it not only contributes to the theoretical framework of cyberbullying discourse analysis but also informs practical interventions aimed at cultivating a safer online community.

Based on our exploration of cyberbullying discourse on Sina Weibo, we advocate for targeted educational programs and platform-level innovations. These recommendations aim to address the complex interplay between language use, societal norms, and technology in the digital age.

Schools should integrate digital literacy and ethics into their curricula, emphasizing critical engagement with online content and interactions. By analyzing real-life examples of cyberbullying, students can develop a deeper understanding of the socio-cognitive processes underpinning online

discourse. Educators, equipped with knowledge in digital communication ethics, are crucial in guiding this reflective process.

Social media platforms must enhance their content moderation systems using advanced AI to more effectively identify comments that contain impoliteness or other violent characteristics. Additionally, giving users more sophisticated tools to manage their online interactions can significantly reduce the incidence and impact of cyberbullying. These measures will contribute to creating a safer and more respectful online environment.

5.3. Extending the "Discourse-Cognition-Society" Model

In exploring the intricate dynamics of cyberbullying on Sina Weibo, our investigation brings forth insights that simultaneously affirm and extend van Dijk's "Discourse-Cognition-Society" model. While van Dijk's model robustly outlines the interplay between discourse practices and societal norms, our findings highlight the nuanced ways in which these interactions manifest within the realm of digital communication, particularly in online communities.

Our study underscores the diversity in community norms surrounding cyberbullying, revealing that behaviors deemed acceptable in one online community may be considered impolite or aggressive in another. This variability suggests a more complex relationship between societal norms and discourse practices than van Dijk's model might initially suggest. For instance, the normalization of certain cyberbullying behaviors within specific user groups on Sina Weibo illustrates the fluidity of societal norms in digital spaces.

Contrary to the expectation of a uniform influence of societal norms across diverse online communities, our analysis points to a complex normalization process of cyberbullying behaviors. This indicates a nuanced interplay where community-specific values and identities significantly shape the perception and acceptance of what constitutes cyberbullying.

By highlighting the significance of digital community identity in mediating the relationship between societal norms and discourse practices, Our findings propose extending van Dijk's model to acknowledge the nature of discourse practices influenced by various online community norms. This adaptation acknowledges the dynamic nature of discourse practices influenced by the multiplicity of online community norms.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our application of van Dijk's "Discourse-Cognition-Society" Model (2009) to Sina Weibo cyberbullying provides valuable insights into understanding cyberbullying. Through a specific framework of impoliteness, we have identified the primary linguistic strategies employed in cyberbullying comments. By examining the interplay between cyberbullying discourse and societal norms, we have revealed the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying language and its deep-seated roots in social cognition, highlighting the influence of factors such as gender, power dynamics, and societal status. Additionally, we have proposed recommendations for managing online communication and enhancing the awareness of netizens.

To further our understanding of cyberbullying's intricate

dynamics, future research should broaden its lens to include diverse social media environments and cultural landscapes. A comparative analysis across platforms like TikTok and different cultural contexts could unveil both universal and culture-specific patterns of cyberbullying, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of its mechanisms. This expansion is crucial for devising effective, culturally attuned interventions that address the complex nature of cyberbullying across global digital landscapes.

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